

U.S. Department of the Interior Bureau of Land Management

DOI-BLM-MT-0010-2013-0016-EA
February 21, 2013

Acton Recreation Area Mountain Bike Trail System

Location: All public lands managed by the Bureau of Land Management, Billings Field Office located in the Acton Recreation Area: T.3 N., R. 25 E., Sections 5 (lots 1, 2, 3, 4, S $\frac{1}{2}$ N $\frac{1}{2}$, S $\frac{1}{2}$); 6 (lots 1, 2, S $\frac{1}{2}$ NE); 7 (lots 1, 2, E $\frac{1}{2}$, E $\frac{1}{2}$ W $\frac{1}{2}$); 8 (all); 9 (all); 17 (all); and the N $\frac{1}{2}$ of the N $\frac{1}{2}$ of Section 20; and T. 4 N., R. 25 E, Section 31 (E $\frac{1}{2}$) in Yellowstone County, Montana.



U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management
Billings Field Office
5001 Southgate Drive
Billings, Montana 59101
Phone: 406-896-5013
Fax: 406-896-5281



CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND NEED FOR THE PROPOSED ACTION

INTRODUCTION

The BLM and its partners (private individuals from the local biking community) propose to develop a comprehensive mountain bike trail system for use by the public. The trails system would use the designated road network and existing but currently unauthorized trails for transport as well as having some new single track construction connecting different segments. There would be a number of single tracks and wide track trails offering a range of difficulties, several staging areas, and associated infrastructure including signing, kiosks, gates in the range allotment and public land fencing and picnic tables.

The proposed Mountain Bike Trail system has received consistent support from local, regional, and national-mountain bicycling advocacy groups. Local clubs, dealers, and interested individuals have been instrumental in the development of this proposal and have expressed interest in assisting with construction, and maintenance of the trail. The International Mountain Bicycling Association (IMBA) has offered support and advice for the trail development. The proposed trail system has had little opposition expressed at this time.

BACKGROUND

The Acton Recreation Area is a 3,750.9 acre tract of public land located 18 miles north of Billings. Of this total acreage approximately 1,760.56 acres are classified as Land Utilization lands meaning that they were previously homesteaded and then later acquired by the federal government under the authority of the Bankhead-Jones Farm Tenant Act of 1937. These lands were typically damaged from homesteading efforts and the Federal Government agreed to rehabilitate and use them for a variety of purposes, which later evolved into multiple uses after the passage of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976.

PURPOSE AND NEED FOR THE PROPOSED ACTION

The purpose of the project is to construct a designated mountain bike trail system, offering users a variety of experiences and opportunities in a controlled and manageable setting. This would avoid future impacts, user conflicts and related problems, including new user-created trails. This EA would not change the current area designations or change current road or trail designations.

The need is to establish a mountain bike trail system in an area that is currently underserved. Mountain bike use has increased since the existing Resource Management Plan was completed in 1983. The BLM is concerned that the continuing unrestricted use could potentially cause erosion, damage cultural and historical sites, and create user conflicts, as well as increasing the potential for user injury. The trend of increased use is expected to continue. In order to minimize further resource damage and to avoid future impacts, management of mountain bikes needs to be reviewed.

DESIRED OUTCOMES (GOALS AND OBJECTIVES)

- Public lands managed by the Billings Field Office provide a diverse array of benefits to the public, including economic, environmental, personal, and social opportunities.
- BLM policy (BLM Recreation Strategy, 2014 - 2019) is to develop and maintain cooperative relationships with national, state, and local recreation providers, tourism entities, and local recreational groups.
- BLM's goal is to develop and maintain appropriate recreational facilities, balancing public demand, protection of public land resources, and fiscal responsibility.
- The management direction is to emphasize and support collaborative public outreach, awareness events, and programs that promote public service and stewardship, and to encourage sustainable travel and tourism development with local communities and provide community-based conservation support for visitor service. The emphasis is placed on providing interpretive and informational signs and materials for public lands visitors, maintaining facilities to a high standard consistent with the recreational setting, and limiting development of additional facilities to those areas where public recreational use of surrounding public lands requires them.

SCOPING/ISSUES

Limited external scoping occurred with user groups and local bike shops; they identified the need for the project. Internal scoping occurred on March 4, 2013. The primary resource issue identified during the scoping meeting was the presence of cultural and historical resources, including the Hoskins Basin Archeological District, as well as concerns regarding potential erosion impacts and public safety. On March 8, 2013 this document was posted in the NEPA log on the Billings Field Office internet web page. Due to the low level of public involvement on similar actions in the past no additional external scoping was conducted.

CONFORMANCE WITH BLM LAND USE PLAN(S)

Although not specifically addressed in the 1984 RMP, the Proposed Action is consistent with the resource objectives stated on page 45 of the Record of Decision.

The Proposed Action is in conformance with the Billings Resource Management Plan Final EIS (1984) Record of Decision (ROD) and its subsequent amendments:

- The Billings Resource Area Management Plan (1983) ROD (1984) as amended by the Fire/Fuels Management Plan Environmental Assessment/Plan Amendment for Montana and the Dakotas (2003).
- Areas of Critical Environmental Concern. 1998
- OHV Off-Highway Vehicle Environmental Impact Study, 2001
- Fire/Fuels Management Plan Environmental Assessment/Plan Amendment for Montana and the Dakotas 2003

- Montana/Dakotas Standards and Guidelines, Nov. 1996
- Oil and Gas Leasing and Development, January 2003
- Wind Energy Development, December 2005
- West-Wide Energy Corridors, January 2009

RELATIONSHIPS TO STATUTES, REGULATIONS AND OTHER PLANS

This action is consistent with the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976, as amended, Public Law (P.L.) 94-579 (43 United States Code (U.S.C.) 1701 et seq.) and with the Federal Lands Recreation and Enhancement Act of 2004 (REA), P.L. 108-447 (16 U.S.C. § 6804.)

This action is also consistent with the following:

1. The BLM Recreation and Visitor Services Strategy for Montana.
2. The BLM's Recreation Strategy. (March, 2014)
3. BLM National Mountain Bicycling Strategic Action Plan. (November 2002)
4. OHV EIS and Plan Amendment for Montana, North Dakota and portions of South Dakota, January 2001.

CHAPTER 2 DESCRIPTION OF ALTERNATIVES

DECISION TO BE MADE

This EA focuses only on the Proposed and No Action Alternatives. There were no other action alternatives that were considered but eliminated from detailed analysis. The No Action Alternative is defined as not taking action, while the Proposed Action is the project design subject to review.

NO ACTION

The No Action alternative is considered and analyzed to provide a baseline for comparison of the impacts of the Proposed Action. The No Action Alternative represents the status quo.

There would be no enhancement of recreational opportunities and the BLM would not meet the needs of public and the mountain bike community. User-created trails would continue to be used and additional trails could be developed through use, with the related potential impacts of increased erosion, impacts to historical and/or cultural sites, and user conflicts.

PROPOSED ACTION

The site of the Proposed Action is on the BLMs Acton Recreation Area northeast of Acton, Montana in Yellowstone County on Heag Road. See Figure 1 (page 10) for the location of specific routes which are under consideration.

The Proposed Action would consist of designating three (3) “Super D” runs (Gravity feed) for extreme riders, two downhill runs for general and experienced riders and a number of loop routes for touring of various distances and skill levels. There are a total of approximately 20 miles of trails which are described (below) in 15 separate route sections for analysis purposes. See Figure 2 (page 11) for specific routes.

All of these routes are existing trails and some have been used by the public for some time. Others are relatively newer. BLM has limited knowledge of specific construction dates or who built many of the trails since none were constructed under authorization. New construction is intended to improve safety and avoid resource concerns at specific locations or along portions of the trails.

1. The first Super D run, (Roller Coaster) would be approximately 2 miles long and would start by the northwest parking area and would be run along the hillside down to the lowest part of the property. Some new construction would be required along this route to meet IMBA standards.
2. The Second trail, (Tumbleweed), would branch off from Roller Coaster and run 1.4 miles through the coulee to the access road which runs back to the south staging area.
3. The third trail, (XXX) starts next to Roller Coaster and runs along the spine of the south ridgeline down to the lowest part of the property. It is approximately 1.8 miles in length.
4. Upper Run Trail starts at the end of a designated Road close by the main staging area, and then runs southeasterly to its end at its junction with the Tumbleweed Trail. It is approximately 1.2 miles in length.
5. T1 Trail starts at the main staging area parking lot, and then runs north, finally turning southerly and then southwesterly to its terminus at its junction with Old Road Southeast and Tumbleweed Trails. It is approximately 3.2 miles in length.

All “Super D” trails are designed to be a continuous surface trail, with no gaps or drops.

6. The first downhill route, (Witts Run) is an existing trail and runs app. 0.5 miles, running from the BLM primitive camping site (see Figure 2) southerly until it ends at a coulee alongside the road. This trail consists of jumps and drops.
7. The second run, known locally as “Flow Downhill” (AKA “Omo’s Run” and “O-No! Run”), runs from the same starting point and descends 0.5 miles down the ridge to the east of Wits Run to the same end point. This route also has jumps and drops.
8. The third run, known as “Input” starts at the same small parking staging area as Witts Run and Flow Downhill trails. But the trail then heads southwesterly and then easterly. It is approximately 0.3 miles in length. It is not an extreme trail and serves more as an easier access and alternative loop for Witts and Flow Downhill.
9. A short Run Trail is known as “No Return”; it branches off from Input Trail and runs downhill to an intersection with Witts Run Trail. It is approximately 0.4 miles in length.
10. The first of the touring routes runs from the west end of a designated vehicle road southeasterly to a designated road intersection. It is approximately 2.53 miles long. It is identified as “Old Road to Southeast” on Figure 2.
11. There is another trail (Black Haul) which branches off from this route, running southwesterly, finally intersecting with the designated road again. It is approximately 0.5 miles long.
12. Explorer Trail runs easterly from a designated Road along the public and private land boundary, and then turns northwesterly until it ends along the same vehicle road approximately 0.5 miles east from its starting point. It is approximately 2.1 miles long.
13. Southwest Trail runs from the end of a designated road to a road intersection. It is 1.8 miles in length.
14. Whoopee Trail is a trail segment which branches from Southwest Trail, runs its course southerly of Southwest Trail and meets with Southwest Trail again 0.2 miles from the east end of the Southwest Trail.
15. Note: “Tumbleweed XXX” is identified as a separate trail but for a portion of its course (0.2 miles) it combines a segment of “Tumbleweed” (trail 2, above) with the “XXX” trail (trail 3 above) and then breaks from it.

All trails are existing at this time, but are not authorized and not at appropriate safety standards described below. The total impact is estimated at being at most 24.24 acres (approximately 20 miles of trails X 10 foot width) although this is only the trail corridor width, not the actual construction width.

Construction Methods

Trail Network: The Proposed Action is to officially designate and improve to safety standards the existing mountain bike trails depicted in Figure 1 (page 10). The majority of the trails would contour the west slope of Ridges incorporating gentle climbs and some steep descents throughout their lengths. The trails would be designed specifically for mountain bikes according to the International Mountain Bicycling Association's (IMBA) standards described in the book "Trail Solutions – IMBA's Guide to Building Sweet Singletrack". Design standards would maximize both mountain bike riding "flow" and natural hydrologic flow patterns. Short portages and/or rock stairs, where riders must dismount and carry their bikes, may be incorporated if necessary to traverse extremely steep, narrow, or rocky sections of trail on both "Super D" and downhill trail types. Construction is not anticipated on the touring routes but there may be some minor alterations such as limbing of overhanging trees on these routes.

Construction would be performed by a combination of trail machines (such as Sweco bulldozer, skid-steer loader, mini-excavator), as well as hand construction by groups such as the Montana Conservation Corps, BLM staff, contractors, and volunteers. Hand crew construction would focus on sensitive sites such as stream crossings, steep drainages, rocky outcrops, sensitive wildlife habitat, stands of large trees with little room for trail machines to maneuver without damaging trees, and remote locations with no access routes for trail machines. The trail machines would be used in locations with suitable access routes, few rocky outcrops. Some hand crew finish work may be required on the machine-built segments.

The trail corridor would be a width of up to 10 feet. In this corridor any standing brush or tree branches which might be hazardous to riders would be removed if unable to be pruned out of the way. No trees over 8 inches diameter would be cut. All stumps would be removed from, and immediately adjacent to, the trail bed. Branches extending over the trail would be cut no less than 10 feet above the trail bed. The trail bed would be constructed as a full bench trail, with a desired maximum width of approximately 3 feet. The cut bank would be backsloped to a 2:1 slope. Those trail segments constructed by trail machine may be initially somewhat wider (4-5 feet wide) but would be allowed to diminish to a narrower tread. Although generally outsloped (approximately 1-3%), the trail would also incorporate frequent grade reversals and rolling dips to maintain hydrologic flow patterns and to shed water off the trail. Inslope turns would be constructed to maintain good mountain bike riding "flow", and would incorporate a grade reversal immediately above and below the turn to prevent water from carrying through the turn. The trail would be with frequent turning and changes of grade. Retaining walls of rock and/or treated lumber would be constructed where necessary to stabilize the trail, particularly on switchback turns. Areas showing evidence of recent hillslope instability would be avoided. Evidence of recent instability includes active sloughing, tension cracks, scarps and rockfalls.

Currently all of the proposed trails are in place, many with some form of water barring. These trails would be reviewed and monitored for accelerated erosion. Where problems currently exist, new water bars or grade reversals would be installed. In areas of new construction, water bars would be installed in accordance with the IMBA and BLM handbooks.

Trailhead Parking Area: A small trailhead and parking area would be improved at the existing entrance road to the network of designated roads and unauthorized trails described above. Another small area located a few miles inside the Recreation Area at the intersection of two vehicle roads would be improved (Figure 2). The proposed trailheads and parking areas would be located immediately adjacent to where the existing road meets the Shelter Cove Road, and would be constructed on the existing footprint created during construction and use of the original road network. The proposed parking area would provide parking for no more than 5-6 vehicles, space sufficient for entrance, exit, and safe turning of vehicles into parking spaces. Trailhead facilities would consist of an information kiosk, perimeter fencing of a wooden pole and rail type, parking barriers, and a picnic table.

Construction of the trailhead and parking areas would be performed by a combination of trail machines, and/or backhoe. Both sites have previously disturbed areas and are currently used for parking, with the entrance site already having regular and continuous use and the other site having less. The native soil would be graded to approximate final grade, including drainage features, then surfaced and graded with compacted aggregate material. Concrete or composite parking bumper stops would be installed and spiked into place to designate parking sites. A standard trailhead informational kiosk would be installed where the trails exit the parking areas, as well as a picnic table.

Signing at trailheads and along trails would provide safety messages and resource information such as multiple uses, trail ratings according to IMBA standards, and distances. Private/Public and Public/State boundaries would be signed where needed.

As noted previously. The total project area would cover approximately 24.24 acres at a maximum.

Timeline: Construction is tentatively set for beginning in the spring or early summer of FY 2014 and is anticipated to be two (2) weeks per mile for the trail work and less than one (1) week for the rest of the associated facilities. The supplies and equipment would be staged at previously disturbed lands at the entrance parking area, which is large enough to accommodate the equipment and supplies while still providing for ongoing use.

Impact Mitigation Measures:

Trail Construction: These measures are incorporated into the Proposed Action to minimize potential impacts from the construction of the proposed trails

- 1) Trail tread construction would be limited to non-rain periods.
- 2) Disruption of natural hydrologic flow paths, including diversion of stream flow and interception of surface and subsurface flow would be minimized through trail design.
- 3) All construction tools or equipment would be inspected and cleaned of any plant parts capable of reproduction prior to entering the project area to minimize the introduction of invasive, non-native vegetation/plant species.
- 4) Any trail segments which cannot be used due to resource concerns would be closed, and camouflaged or barricaded to prevent further use.

- 5) Trailhead Parking Lot Construction: The impact minimization measures sited above for the construction of the proposed trails would also be incorporated into the construction of the proposed trailhead parking area. Additional measures specific to the construction of the trailhead parking area would also be incorporated into the Proposed Action:
- 6) Retain vegetation around the periphery of the trailhead parking lots to provide as much shade as possible to discourage invasive, non-native plant invasion.
- 7) Discovery of Unrecorded Cultural or Paleontological Resources Protocol
 - a. The trail construction operators and users of the bicycle trails would immediately bring any objects or resources of cultural or paleontological value discovered as a result of trail use under this authorization to the attention of the authorized officer. The trail users would suspend all activities in the vicinity of such a discovery until notified to proceed by the authorized officer. If human remains are discovered or suspected the operator would suspend operations immediately, physically guard the area, and notify the BLM Billings Field Office immediately.
 - b. The trail users could be subject to prosecution for knowingly disturbing, altering, injuring, excavating, removing or destroying any historical or archaeological site, structure, building, or object on Federal lands.
 - c. The Authorized Officer will evaluate the discoveries brought to his/her attention, take action to protect or remove the resource, and allow trail use to proceed within 10 working days after notification to the Authorized Officer of such discovery. The decision as to the appropriate measures to mitigate adverse effects to cultural or paleontological resources will be made by the Authorized Officer.

Management and Use:

Trail Use: The proposed trails are designed as offering a range of difficulties, yet be challenging routes that combine quality scenery, a diversity of natural features, a fun trail experience and opportunity for physical exercise for all users. The trails would be open year-round for all types of non-motorized use; but they are designed primarily for mountain bike use. The trail is expected to be used intermittently during the winter months, although dry times between storms may afford good opportunities for use.

The BLM would monitor trail conditions frequently to assess potential erosion or trail rutting, inspect the function of drainage features, and stream crossings, and to detect any unauthorized motorized use on the trails. If unforeseen impacts, particularly sediment movement begin to occur during the wet season, then a seasonal closure would be an option to prevent erosion. Monitoring would also help determine trail maintenance needs.

Rustic trail signs would be placed at all trail junctions. These signs would provide directional orientation as well as mountain biking difficulty rating symbol. Difficulty rating symbols would conform to standard ratings as defined by the International Mountain Bicycling Association (IMBA) and determined by experienced Mountain Bike enthusiasts. Off Highway Vehicle restrictions would be posted at appropriate locations, and gates or barriers would be installed as “filters” for deterring motorized vehicle traffic.

Parking Area use: The proposed trailhead parking area would be utilized for parking by users of the Acton Mountain Bike trail system and for any other visitors to these public lands. (These lands are currently used by other recreationists as well as mountain bikers). Overnight use would be permitted. Trail information, interpretation, and regulations, including the Discovery of Unrecorded Cultural or Paleontological Resources protocol, would be posted on a standard Billings Field Office trailhead kiosk.

Information regarding the Mountain Bike trail system including general description, length, level of difficulty, trailhead parking areas, sensitive resources, etc. would be included in the BiFO web page, trail description interpretive displays at both of the proposed improved Trailhead parking areas.

Trail Maintenance and Impact Minimization measures: BLM has developed partnerships with local mountain bike enthusiasts to help maintain and promote appropriate use of the trail. BLM staff, Montana Conservation Corps (MCC) crews, and seasonal employees would also perform trail maintenance (brushing, log outs, tread repair, etc.). The majority of trail maintenance would be accomplished utilizing non-motorized hand tools only. In the event of maintenance requiring motorized equipment, such as chainsaws, or repairs greater in extent than routine maintenance the following impact minimization measures would be incorporated:

- 1) Maintenance and repair work involving movement of soil would be limited to non-rain periods, except remedial repairs to drainage features.
- 2) Maintenance and repair work would incorporate all other impact minimization measures as those specified for trail construction.

Figure 1: Map of Proposed Mountain Bike Routes

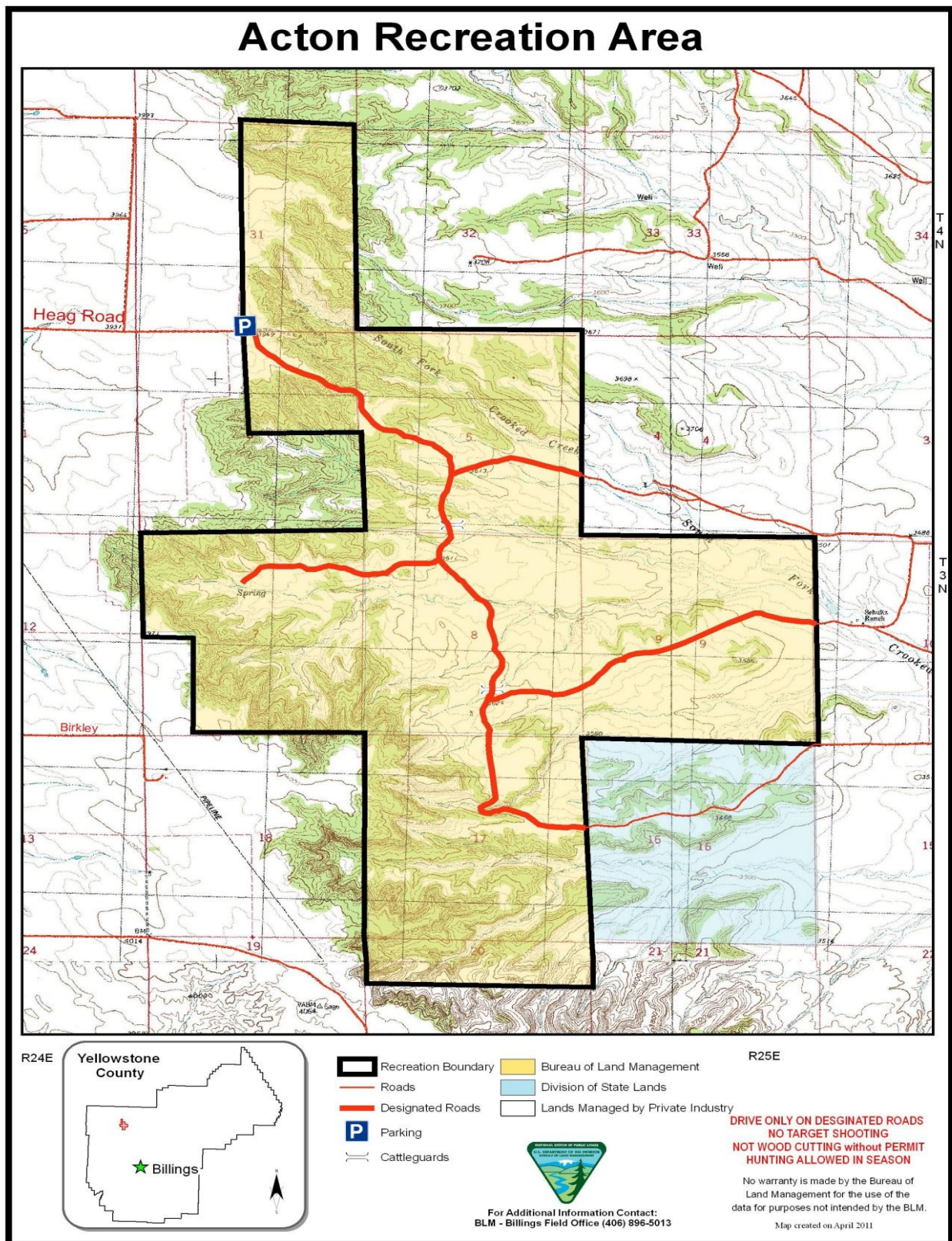
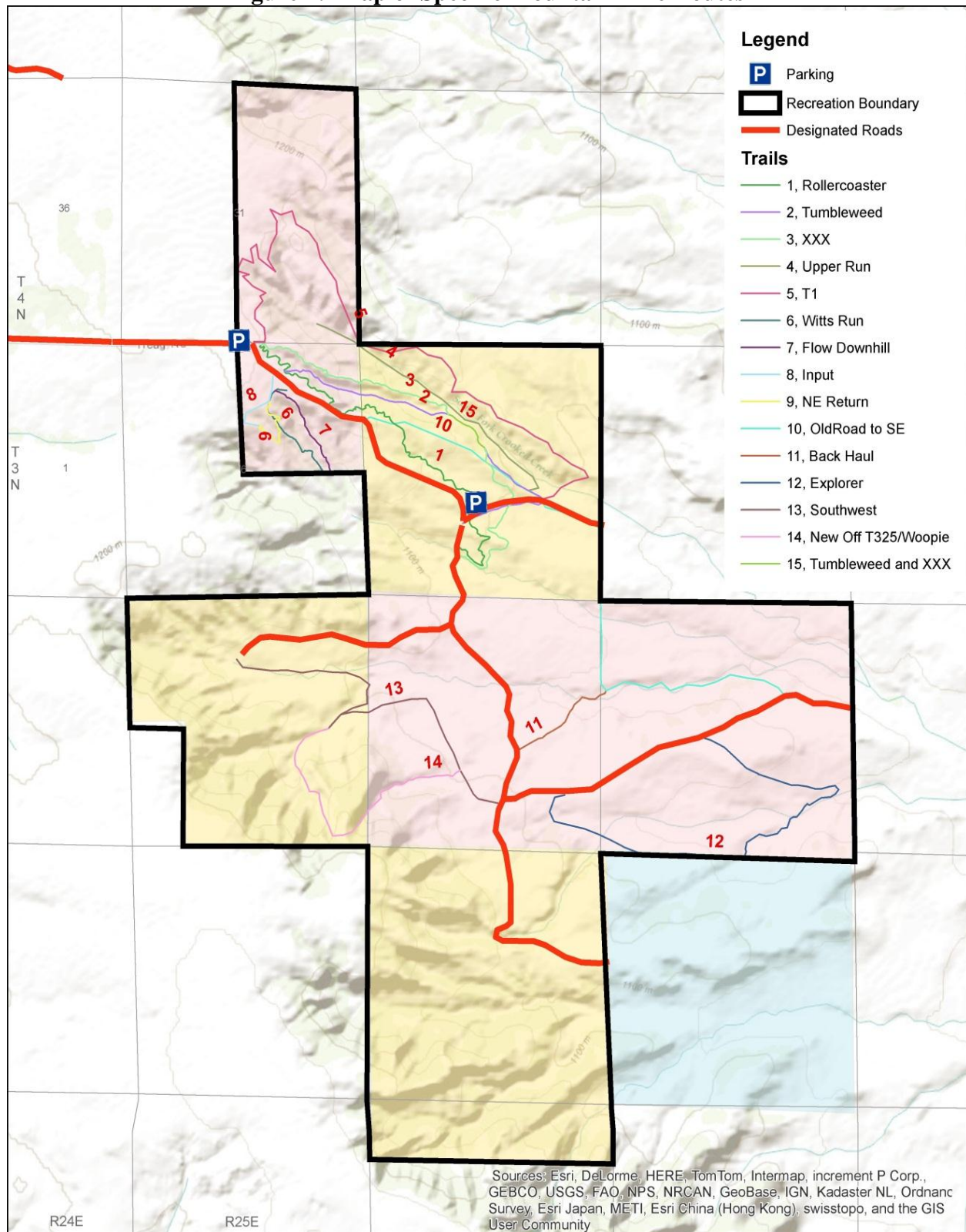


Figure 2: Map of Specific Mountain Bike Routes



CHAPTER 3

AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT/ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS

INTRODUCTION AND GENERAL SETTING

This chapter describes the affected environment and analyzes impacts to the components of the human environment either affected or potentially affected by the Proposed Action, the No Action alternative.

The lands are mostly natural in appearance with structures limited to fences, cattle guards, and stock tank/ troughs. Signs are limited to route designations. Closed travel routes are blocked with buck and pole barricades. Dispersed campsites are located throughout the area and receive light use. Recreational group sizes are less than ten, typically three or less per group.

Visitors could expect to encounter up to 20-30 persons per day on weekends, +/- 5 persons on weekdays. Rules are posted at the trailhead parking area. Use may be temporarily restricted due to permitted events or due to resource concerns due like weather. The Acton Recreation Area accommodates multiple-use including livestock grazing. OHVs are restricted to designated routes per travel management plan. This area can be accessed by ordinary highway vehicles; middle and backcountry areas are accessible by 4-wheel drive vehicles and ATVs, UTVs, motorcycles, mountain bikes, horseback, and by foot.

The area typically receives between 11-14 inches of precipitation annually. Public lands are located on three ecological sites: shallow sites compose approximately 64%, clayey sites compose approximately 31%, and silty sites compose approximately 5%.

The dominant species include bluebunch wheatgrass, green needlegrass, needleandthread, and western wheatgrass. Annuals include salsify, peppergrass, wooly plantain, and Japanese brome. Annual species were estimated to have a canopy cover of less than 6%. Perennial forbs present on the site include slimflower scurfpea, milkvetch, and hairy golden aster. Trees, shrubs and succulents present include: Wyoming big sagebrush, ponderosa pine, prickly pear, and broom snake weed.

The Acton Recreation Area offers a challenging course for mountain bikers with significant elevation gains and loss that also requires a significant commitment of time, energy, and level of fitness. That appeals to dedicated mountain bike enthusiasts within the region, some of whom travel extended distances to enjoy the recreational opportunities. The project is being implemented to meet the current use levels and to provide the public with minimal facilities and appropriate safety levels.

The initial intent of the project, however, was to develop a trail system to meet the needs of the entire local mountain bike community, which is the largest in Montana. Currently there is no established network of trails available, either on public lands managed by BLM or on private rural lands, which offer the potential for this type of experience in this kind of setting.

Mountain bike use in this area is increasing rapidly, dealers have expressed interest and noted the demand and need for this kind of site. Families as well as organized groups and competitive events would be served by this trail system. There is an extensive bike trail system in and around Billings, however, there is nothing officially designed or designated which offers this kind of experience.

The Proposed Action would construct a network of trails that riders of various abilities and fitness levels could enjoy, and greatly increase the diversity of terrain, habitat, and scenic vistas that riders could experience.

Critical Elements of the Human Environment and Other Resources Brought Forward for Analysis: Certain resources are protected by specific laws, regulations, or policies (e.g., Executive Orders). BLM refers to these resources as “Critical Elements of the Human Environment” and addresses them in all EAs. Those Critical Elements that are identified below as being present and potentially affected would be analyzed further in this chapter (Table 1). The affected environment and environmental impacts are described for all resources, including Critical Elements, which are potentially affected by the Proposed Action.

Table 1: Critical Elements of the Human Environment and Other Resources

CRITICAL ELEMENTS		
Determination*	Resource	Rationale for Determination
NI	Air Quality (<i>The Clean Air Act of 1955, as amended</i>)	The air quality has not been measured for this proposal. Heavy equipment emissions would be created during the construction phase of the Proposed Action. This is expected to be a very short term impact at best – only during on ground construction periods.
NP	Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (<i>Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976</i>)	There are no lands designated as an Area of Critical Environmental Concern present. There are no lands which have been proposed for possible designation as an ACEC present
PI	Cultural Resources (<i>National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended</i>)	Bike trails are located partially within Hoskins Basin Archaeological District. Cultural resource inventory was conducted to ensure known cultural resources would not be impacted.
NP	Environmental Justice (<i>Executive Order 12898</i>)	According to Executive Order 12898 of February 11, 1994, all Federal actions must address and identify as appropriate, disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects of its programs, policies, and activities on minority populations and low-income populations in the United States. The project proposal does not constitute an activity that would adversely affect minority populations and/or low-income populations in the United States.
NP	Farmlands (Prime & Unique) (<i>Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act of 1977</i>)	There are no prime or unique farmlands within the BLM project area limits.
NP	Floodplains (<i>Executive Order 11988</i>)	There are no designated floodplains within the project area.
NI	Invasive, Non-native weed species (<i>Federal Noxious Weed Act of 1974, as amended</i>)	Cheatgrass and Japanese Brome are present in the project area
NP	Native American Religious Concerns (<i>Executive Order 13007</i>)	No Native American Religious Concerns are known in the area, and none have been noted by Tribal authorities. Should recommended inventories or future consultations with Tribal authorities reveal the existence of such sensitive properties, appropriate mitigation and/or protection measures may be undertaken.
NP	Threatened, Endangered, or Candidate Plant Species (<i>Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended</i>)	There are no known Threatened, Endangered or Candidate plant species known to exist in the proposed project area.

PI	Threatened, Endangered, or Candidate Animal Species (<i>Endangered Species Act of 1973, as amended</i>)	The eastern area is considered “general” habitat for Greater Sage-Grouse, with no leks identified within the area. There are three sage-grouse leks within 4 miles of the proposed project area.
NP	Wastes (hazardous or solid) (<i>Resource Conservation and Recovery Act of 1976, and Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act of 1980</i>)	There are no hazardous or solid wastes within the BLM project area. Hazardous or solid wastes would not be used as part of the project proposal.
NP	Water Quality (drinking/ground) (<i>Safe Drinking Water Act of 1974, as amended and Clean Water Act of 1977</i>)	No surface waters present. No impacts ground water.
NP	Wetlands / Riparian Zones (<i>Executive Order 11990</i>)	There are no wetlands or riparian areas present within the project area.
NP	Wild and Scenic Rivers (<i>Wild and Scenic Rivers Act of 1968, as amended</i>)	There are no river segments which have been designated as a Wild and Scenic River present. There are no river segments which have been found to be either eligible or suitable for inclusion in the Wild and Scenic River program
NP	Wilderness (<i>Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 and Wilderness Act of 1964</i>)	There are no lands designated as a Wilderness present. There are no lands which are under study by Congress for possible designation as a Wilderness (WSA status)
OTHER RESOURCES / CONCERNS		
Determination*	Resource	Rationale for Determination
NI	Fuels / Fire Management	There would be no impact to fuels or the fire program from this project.
PI	Fish and Wildlife including Special Status Species other than FWS candidate or listed species e.g. Migratory birds (<i>E.O. 13186</i>)	Antelope, mule deer, small mammals, raptors and migratory birds, amphibians, and reptiles.
NI	Geology / Mineral Resources/Energy Production	The proposed project would not impact Geology, Mineral Resources, or Energy production.
NI	Lands / Access	Designation of a trail system would not impact lands or access or realty actions (Rights-of-Way) in the area.
PI	Livestock Grazing (<i>Taylor Grazing Act of 1934, National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 Endangered Species Act of 1973, Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976, and the Public Rangelands Improvement Act of 1978</i>)	Current recreational uses are occurring in conjunction with livestock grazing. Few conflicts have occurred in the past with the two uses. As the trails become developed under the Proposed Action, an increase in recreational use would be expected, however livestock grazing would continue to be available.
PI	Paleontology (<i>Paleontological Resources Protection Act P.L. 111-011, HR 146</i>)	There are no known paleontological resources located within the Acton Recreation Area. PFYC data suggests a high potential for such resources and possible impacts could occur with the Proposed Action.
NI	Rangeland Health Standards and Guidelines (<i>43 CFR 4180</i>)	The 2006, conformance reviews found all standards for rangeland health being achieved. It is expected standards would continue to be achieved under both alternatives.
PI	Recreation	The project has potential to impact recreational use numbers, alter trends, and possibly alter season of uses.
NI	Socioeconomics	This project does not have potential to alter the socioeconomic structure of the surrounding communities
PI	Soils	The project has the potential to impact soils. See the vegetation and soils section below.
PI	Vegetation including Special Status Plant Species other than FWS candidate or listed species	The project would impact vegetation, please see the vegetation and soils section below.
PI	Visual Resource Management (<i>FLPMA 1976, NEPA 1969</i>)	The lands are currently managed as Visual Resource Management (VRM) Class II and III. The project has potential to raise the visual intrusion of man-made works higher than what is currently found on the Recreation Area.
NP	Wild Horses and Burros (<i>Wild and Free Roaming Horses and Burros Act of 1971, as amended</i>)	There are no Wild Horses and Burro located within the project area.
NP	Wilderness Characteristics	There are no lands which have been inventoried and found d to possess wilderness characteristics present..

NI	Woodland / Forestry	Trail is existing and any brush, limb or tree removal would be minor and for the purpose of clearing the trail for safe passage. No commercial products would be cut.
<p>*</p> <p>NP = not present in the area impacted by the proposed or alternative actions</p> <p>NI = present, but not affected to a degree that detailed analysis is required</p> <p>PI = present and may be impacted to some degree. Will be analyzed in affected environment and environmental impacts.</p> <p>(NOTE: PI does not mean impacts are likely to be significant in any way).</p>		

Air Quality

Affected Environment

In general, the air quality within the project area is good as there are no known point sources of emissions nearby. The surrounding land uses are rangeland grazing, farming and transportation. The primary pollutants of concern are PM-10 and PM-2.5 which are temporarily released due vehicle passage along the road and from periodic agricultural processes

Environmental Impacts

No Action Alternative:

There would not be any impacts to air quality as a result of implementing the No Action alternative.

Proposed Action Alternative:

Impacts to air quality from implementing the Proposed Action would be short term and temporary in nature. Products of combustion would be released in the exhaust of all equipment used to construct the trails. The duration of this emission is expected to be about 1 week. Additionally, dust containing PM-10 and PM 2.5 would be released during construction, and for a brief period of time during wind events following construction.

Cultural Resources

Affected Environment

Three cultural resource inventory reports conducted in the same sections as the project area appear in the Cultural Resource Annotated Bibliography System (CRABS) database of the Montana State Historic Preservation Office (Table 2). These reports have various degrees of information relevant to this analysis. In addition, a Class III cultural resource inventory was conducted along the main road through the Acton Recreation Area and the sixteen bike trails in 2013. Six new cultural resources were identified.

Table 2: Manuscripts for Cultural Resource Inventories

MS #	Title	Author	Date
10665	POTHOLE SPRING	TAYLOR, JOHN F	1988
13206	CENTER SPRING	TAYLOR, JOHN F	1991
28471	CULTURAL RESOURCE INVENTORY OF THE PROPOSED CENTER SPRING DEVELOPMENT IN YELLOWSTONE COUNTY, MONTANA	HADDEN, GLADE V	2006

	ACTON RECREATION BIKE TRAILS: A CLASS III CULTURAL RESOURCE INVENTORY IN YELLOWSTONE COUNTY, MONTANA	MACY, JENNIFER N	2013
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Eight (8) previously recorded archaeological/historic sites appear in the Cultural Resources Information System (CRIS) within the sections prescribed for project activity. Six cultural resources were recorded in 2013. Included in the previously recorded sites is the Hoskins Basin Archaeological District, listed on the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) in 1974. This district is on both public and private lands. The Archaeological District covers 70% of the proposed project area and is significant for containing a number of unique wooden structures including cribbed log and conical structures. It is uncommon for sites of this nature to be found in close proximity with one another, which is the primary reason the Hoskins Basin Archaeological District was created. Both types of dwellings were becoming increasingly rare due to weathering, theft and accident by 1974, so the Archaeological District was created for the “protection and preservation of the site in Hoskins Basin”. The National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form states: These archaeological sites all constitute a logical unit of human use and should be nominated to the National Register to protect their values regardless of ownership. Additional consideration for this project has been made due to the location of sites within the Hoskins Basin Archaeological District. Eight of the cultural resources within the Acton Recreation Area are located in the Hoskins Basin Archaeological District, five are not.

Within public lands, five sites are eligible for listing on the NRHP, three of which are already listed. Five sites remain unevaluated. Unevaluated sites should be treated as eligible until a specific NRHP determination is completed. Four of the newly documented sites have been determined not eligible for the NRHP (Table 3).

Table 3: Cultural Site Distribution and NRHP status

Site #	Site Type 1	Site Type 2	Time Period	Owner	NR Status
24YL0753	Archaeological District	Conical Timbered Lodge	Combination	Combination	NR Listed
24YL0761	Historic Homestead/Farmstead	Historic Trash Dump	Prehistoric More Than One Period	BLM	Unevaluated
24YL0762	Combo Prehistoric/Historic	Petroglyph and Pictograph	No Indication of Time	BLM	CD
24YL0763	Cribbed Log Occupation Structure	Archaeological District	Historic Period	BLM	CD
24YL1028	Lithic Material Concentration	No Data	Prehistoric Middle Period	BLM	Unevaluated
24YL1029	Wooden Structure	No Data	Historic Period	BLM	NR Listed
24YL1031	Lithic Material Concentration	No Data	No Data	BLM	NR Listed

24YL1133	Lithic Material Concentration	No Data	No Indication of Time	BLM	Unevaluated
24YL1886*	Historic Corral	Historic	Historic	BLM	Not Eligible
24YL1887	Historic Dump	Historic Dump	Historic	BLM	Not Eligible
24YL1888*	Prehistoric Cairn	Prehistoric	No Indication of Time	BLM	Unevaluated
24YL1889*	Rock Cairn	Historic rock alignment	Historic	BLM	Not Eligible
24YL1890*	Historic CMS	Historic Dump	Historic	BLM	Not Eligible
24YL1891*	Prehistoric Cairn	Prehistoric	No Indication of Time	BLM	Unevaluated

CD – Consensus Determination, * Not Within the Hoskins Basin Archaeological District

Environmental Impacts

The consideration of impacts includes the possibility of previously unrecorded cultural resources becoming apparent. Should this occur, trail users should report this finding to Billings Field Office archaeologists as soon as possible and cease use of the area. The trail users' responsibilities in dealing with cultural resources are clearly defined in the mitigation protocol including who to notify in case of discovery of previously unrecognized sites on public lands. Such sites should be avoided until evaluated by the Field Office Staff.

The risk of impacts to sites within the Hoskins Basin Archaeological District is less than for other sites because the majority of sites within the District are located further from the trails than sites outside the Archaeological District. Impacts to the district as a whole are not anticipated.

Possible impacts to cultural resources along the trails include bicycles skidding, making sharp turns and braking quickly. Impacts to the Archaeological District could include soil erosion, gullyng, and increased potential for unlawful collection and vandalism. In areas where cultural site presence coincides with areas of increased bicycle use, impacts could include unlawful artifact collection. Impacts of regulated bicycle use are not anticipated to known cultural resources provided cyclists stay on designated trails.

No Action Alternative:

Use of the trails would continue as currently established. This alternative would fail to apply the mitigation protocol, would not upgrade the existing trails to IMBA standards, and would provide less protection for undocumented cultural resources.

Proposed Action Alternative:

Under the Proposed Action the existing trails would be recognized, developed, and promoted. During trail construction, the inadvertent discovery of previously unrecorded cultural resources would construction until the Billings Field Office archaeologists are notified. The trail users' responsibilities in dealing with unrecorded cultural sites are clearly defined in the protocol to be posted at the trailheads, including who to notify in case of discovery of previously unrecognized sites on public lands and how such sites are treated until evaluated by the Field Office Staff.

Invasive, Non-native and Noxious Weed Species

Affected Environment

The invasion of native plant communities by noxious and invasive plant species is a continuous threat in Montana with both ecological and economic consequences. Noxious and invasive weeds spread in many ways: animals (livestock, birds, or other wildlife), pets, hikers, bicycling, and all forms of motorized travel, through wind and water movement, etc. These noxious and invasive species can become established on disturbed sites, roadsides, and heavily grazed areas, and can potentially invade healthy rangelands.

Complete and thorough inventories of invasive/non-native plant species have not been completed for the project area. At this time there are no known *noxious* weeds present, although cheatgrass (*Bromus tectorum*) and Japanese brome (*Bromus japonicus*) are present throughout the area in trace amounts. Both are *invasive* non-native species. Cheatgrass is listed as a Montana Priority 3 “Regulated Plant”, which means that “the plant may not be intentionally spread or sold other than as a contaminant in agricultural products”.

Environmental Impacts

No Action Alternative:

Approximately 20 miles of user-created trails would continue to be used by the public. There is a potential for the introduction and spread of noxious and invasive species. The potential would be slightly less than the Proposed Action Alternative since there would be some surface disturbing activities in the Proposed Action.

Proposed Action Alternative:

The Proposed Action would authorize the project to occur. This alternative would allow new soil disturbance to occur on approximately 20 miles of existing routes. Direct impacts may occur due to the nature of the surface disturbance (wheeled, non-motorized). This disturbance would create exposed soil surfaces and thus the opportunity for the introduction and spread of invasive and noxious weeds.

Wildlife / Threatened, Endangered or Candidate Species, Special Status Species, and Migratory Birds

Affected Environment

The wildlife habitat in this recreation area supports many species of wildlife, including but not limited to: big game (antelope, mule deer), small mammals, migratory birds, Greater Sage-Grouse, raptors, amphibians, and reptiles. The only Species of Concern listed for these lands was Greater Sage-Grouse.

The area is dominated by native sagebrush grasslands on the eastern and central flats area and non-timbered areas. There is scattered Ponderosa pine along the ridges, particularly on the west side.

The area is classified as general habitat for Greater Sage-Grouse, with no leks identified within the area. There are 3 sage-grouse leks within 4 miles of the public land boundary (Table 4). Due

to the rougher topography and scattered Ponderosa pine on the western ridges, the timbered areas would not be considered preferred habitat for sage-grouse. The eastern and central flat areas (Sections 8 and 9) would be considered suitable sage-grouse habitat.

Table 4: Sage-Grouse Leks near Acton

Active Sage-Grouse Leks near Acton				
Lek #	Lek Name	LHMC* (Year)	Count Trend	Proximity to Area
YC-SG-8	447	2(07)	Down- Inactive	0.45 mi. NE
YC-SG-12	446	9(97) 0(99)	Down- Inactive	2.5 mi. ENE
YC-SG-3	448	8(97) 0(99)	Down- Inactive	2.4 mi. East

* Last High Male Count

Environmental Impacts

No Action Alternative:

The No Action Alternative would maintain the current conditions and the existing trails would not be brought up to standards. The likelihood of erosion and new pioneer trails (where users create new impacts to avoid eroded areas) would be increased with a corresponding increase of impacts to wildlife species. Typical impacts to be expected are displacement and disruption. Slight losses of habitat from increased erosion could also be expected.

Overall use of the trails, as compared to the Proposed Action would likely be less under this alternative given that trail development and use would be promoted under the Proposed Action to prevent unauthorized trails being developed elsewhere.

Proposed Action Alternative:

The Proposed Action would have slight impacts to wildlife resources due to increased disturbance to sage-grouse, migratory birds, and big game that inhabit the area. Miller et al. (1998) found lower nest survival for grassland birds adjacent to, rather than removed a short distance from hiking trails in Colorado. Miller et al. (1998) found that grassland birds were more likely to nest away from rather than near hiking trails in Colorado, with a zone of influence approximating 75m.¹ It is anticipated that the majority of the impact would be during the warmer times of the year when the trails are being actively used. Impacts to wildlife are expected to be the greatest with mountain bike activity during the Spring and Summer nesting months. Therefore, disturbance and displacement impacts to wildlife reproduction would be greatest to breeding and nesting migratory birds and sage-grouse, especially in the native sagebrush grass areas on the eastern and central flats areas (Sections 8 and 9). Ponderosa pine timbered trail areas would have the least impact to sage-grouse because it not considered suitable habitat for sage-grouse. Considering a trail width of 3 feet, a total disturbance area from trails is estimated at 24.24 acres.

¹ Miller, S.G., R.L. Knight, and C.K. Miller. 1998. Influence of recreational trails on breeding bird communities. Ecological Application 8:162-169.

Mitigation:

- 1.) It is recommended to keep trails to rough topography areas and near timbered areas to reduce impacts to sage-grouse and grassland birds.
- 2.) Reclamation of existing roads / trails that are unnecessary for travel would be recommended.
- 3.) Wildlife field surveys should be conducted to identify potential conflicts. Sage-grouse lek and sign surveys should be conducted in the area.
- 4.) Trail segments 11 and 12 should not be constructed until additional sage-grouse monitoring can be conducted. Appropriate use restrictions should be identified based upon that monitoring.

Livestock Grazing

Affected Environment

The proposed project area is located in the Southwest End grazing allotment. The allotment is composed of approximately 3,280 acres of federal range, and 640 acres of state land. The current season of use runs from May through October, and 459 Animal Unit Months (AUMs) of cattle grazing are authorized annually. Use incorporates seasonal rotations through multiple pastures annually.

The Acton Recreation Area is currently a popular recreation location, and has been for some time. Current uses and use levels and have resulted in few documented conflicts between livestock and the recreationalists in the past.

Environmental Impacts

No Action Alternative:

Under the No Action alternative, the proposed development would not occur, use levels would not change, and therefore no new impacts to livestock grazing would be expected to occur.

Proposed Action Alternative:

Under the Proposed Action the existing trails would be recognized, developed, and promoted. It is expected that this would increase recreational use in the Acton Recreation Area. This could increase recreation/livestock conflicts. Common conflicts include but are not limited to: 1) harassment of livestock from increased human presence; 2) livestock presence on trails; 3) livestock/recreationalist collision; 4) increased facility (fence/gate) maintenance and inspection.

A majority of the trail system is located on timber slopes in the allotment. Livestock use on these areas is typically lower, compared to gentler grass dominated sites. This would reduce potential conflicts. In addition, the main entrance would be signed to notify recreationalists of potential collision conflicts.

Paleontology

Affected Environment

No paleontological sites are reported for the proposed project area. The Potential Fossil Yield Classification for the allotments on BLM lands suggests a moderate to high potential for paleontological resources based on the underlying geology of the area (Table 5 and Appendix 1

Figure 3). The mitigation protocol precludes any severe damage to previously unrecognized paleontological resources.

Table 5: PFYC Ranks in Acton Recreation Area

Project	PFYC Class	BLM acres	% of BLM
Acton Bicycle Trails	3a	17	3
	3b	354	5
	5	3349	92
Totals		3720	100

Environmental Impacts

Impacts to paleontological sites could occur include bicycles skidding, making sharp turns braking quickly, soil erosion, gulying, and increased potential for unlawful collection and vandalism. In areas where paleontological resource presence coincides with areas of high bike travel, continued use could contribute to substantial ground disturbance and cause cumulative, long term effects to unrecognized paleontological resources.

While no paleontological resources are noted within the project area, the potential for fossil bearing formations is moderate - high and may be impacted by the undertaking. The mitigation protocol precludes any severe damage to previously unrecognized cultural or paleontological resources.

No Action Alternative:

The use of the bike trails would continue as has been established. This alternative would fail to apply the mitigation protocol and provide less protection for unrecorded paleontological resources.

Proposed Action Alternative:

Under the Proposed Action the existing trails would be recognized, developed, and promoted. It is expected that this would increase recreational use in the Acton Recreation Area. During trail construction, it is the worker's responsibility to cease all work and notify the Field Office of any inadvertent discovery of paleontological resources.

The trail users' responsibilities in dealing with paleontological sites are clearly defined in the mitigation protocol including who to notify in case of discovery of previously unrecognized sites on public lands and how such sites are treated until evaluated by the Field Office Staff. Provided the actions specified in this document are followed, there would be no impact to paleontological resources.

Recreation

Affected Environment

The Acton Recreation Area is one of the few that is easily accessible to recreationists who enjoy non-motorized off road activities such as mountain biking and horseback riding. Other recreation activities occur to a limited extent, and include day hiking, backpacking, wildlife viewing, hunting and driving for pleasure along the roads. The area is restricted to designated roads for motorized use for resource concerns which has limited the opportunities for motorized recreation, but there still is some casual use of OHVs on the roads, mostly family groups. The entire area is closed to target shooting and open to hunting during seasons established by Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks (MTFWP). There are no organized, commercial, or competitive events occurring on these lands.

Approximately 7,000 visitors use the area annually. Acton provides multiple possibilities for year round use since it has good access and is relatively low in elevation, as well as interesting geology, topographical diversity and vegetation screening. A small kiosk, parking area and identification sign are the only improvements at the site. There are a number of primitive camping sites along the road network.

Up until closure of the unauthorized mountain bike trail system in 2011 for safety and resource concerns, mountain bike activity in the project area was primarily accounted for by bikers riding the existing but unauthorized mountain bike trails. The area was promoted by members of the public as a place to ride due to its topography.

Mountain bikers generally ride this trail each month from April through September. During the winter months, use decreases substantially. Mountain biking on this trail system is expected to double within 5 years as more visitors become aware of this opportunity.

Environmental Impacts

No Action Alternative:

The existing routes would continue to be used. The routes would not meet general use standards for mountain bike trails would continue. There would be no management strategy. There are fences and other facilities which have seen damage and which could continue to see damage as a result of inaction. User conflicts between different types of users may also continue. Erosion from the improperly designed trails would continue.

Proposed Action Alternative:

The visitors would be provided with a quality recreational experience.. The construction of a designated bike trail system reduces unauthorized trail uses in sensitive areas and at sensitive times. There may be impacts to other types of recreational users from increased bike use. This may result in changes in patterns of use, types, of use, and seasons of use. The proposed trail system would improve recreational opportunities and experiences.

Soils

Affected Environment

A majority of the proposed trails would occur within the Blacksheep, dry-Cabbart, dry-Rock outcrop complex, 8 to 60 percent slopes soil map unit. This soil is typically well drained, with a loamy surface texture. Given the soil texture, compaction on trails is expected to be high where soil depth would allow. Currently a majority of the trails have been constructed and used without authorization.

Environmental Impacts

No Action Alternative:

Under this alternative no new trails or trail head/parking areas would not be created or designated. User created trails are likely to persist. Use would continue on the trails. Poorly constructed, un-authorized trails often lead to increased erosion and increased compaction. Many times these trails do not contain necessary design features to channel water off the trail, to minimize water flow along the trail. This increases water volumes, flows, and energy leading to increased erosion. In erosive soils, gullies can quickly form, which could render the trail unsuitable and users may create new trails, exacerbating the problem.

Proposed Action Alternative:

Under the Proposed Action, soils along trails would remain compacted. Additionally, approximately 0.25 mile of new trail would be constructed. This would increase compaction on less than 0.1 acres within the project area. Also, trees with less than 8 inch in width and shrubs within a 10 foot corridor of the trail could be cleared along approximately 2.9 miles of the trails (3.5 acres). Corridor areas would be subject to minor compaction during vegetation removal. Compaction would vary depending on soil moisture, and the equipment used. Compaction would be minimized through design features that restrict equipment work during wet periods.

Soil along trails and corridor areas would be subject to increase erosion as well. Trails would channelize overland water flow, increasing velocity, and water erosions. Most trails currently have water bars in place to minimize these impacts, Under the Proposed Action the new trails would have water bars installed, and existing trails would be reviewed, and if needed, additional water bars would be installed. This would minimize water erosion on trails.

Corridor areas could experience increased erosion as well. Trees and shrubs would be removed, however herbaceous vegetation would be left intact on approximately 3.5 acres. These areas would be left to naturally re-vegetate. Given soils and topography this could be an extended (5+ years) period of time.

Vegetation (Rangelands, Woodlands)

Affected Environment

Common vegetation throughout the project area includes ponderosa pine, juniper, and skunkbush sumac along rock outcrops. Bluebunch wheatgrass, needleandthread, and western wheatgrass are common grass species.

Environmental Impacts

No Action Alternative:

Under the no action alternative no new impacts to vegetation are expected to occur from development of the trail system. Current trails would continue to be used for mountain biking. It is anticipated that new (un-authorized) trails would be created. This could result in the loss of vegetation from the trail route, and declining vegetative vigor of neighboring vegetation. Areas of bare soil and reduced perennial native vegetation could increase the potential for invasive species infestations.

Proposed Action Alternative:

Under the Proposed Action less than 0.1 acres of vegetation would be removed for new trails, additionally up to 3.5 acres of woody vegetation (less than 8 dbh) could be removed for trail corridors however herbaceous vegetation would be left intact. Removal of woody overstory could improve grass stand vigor and diversity along corridor areas due to reduced resource competition. Assuming 3.6 acres of vegetation receive disturbance this is less than 0.001% of the Action recreation area.

Visual Resource Management

Affected Environment

The BLM is required to incorporate visual design considerations into all surface disturbing projects. Public lands are placed into visual resource management classes based on 1) an inventory of their scenic quality, viewer sensitivity and distance zones, and 2) the land use planning process where factors such as special designations, other resource values/needs, public demands etc. are considered. The resulting classes range from I to IV. VRM Class I is the most restrictive management zone and allows for very limited management activities that must mimic and only minimally contrast with the natural environment. This class is reserved for certain areas with special designations including wilderness areas and wild portions of designated wild and scenic rivers. Class II allows for management activities that can be seen, but they must not be at a level that attracts attention. Under this management class, changes in the basic visual elements of form, line, color and texture caused by a management activity must not be evident in the surrounding landscape. Class III allows a moderate level of change to the characteristic landscape. Management activities and uses may attract attention, but should not dominate the view of the casual observer. Class IV provides for actions which require significant surface disturbance, but projects sitting should still consider landscape conditions. The current Billings Field Office Visual Resource Inventory identifies the project area as being within the Management Class II and III zones.

Environmental Impacts

No Action Alternative:

The visual impacts of the unauthorized trails is minor in scale due to vegetation and topography screening, but there are discernable impacts along the ridges lines and across some of the open meadowlands from unauthorized trail construction and use. These would expect to continue, although new unauthorized trail construction would not be expected to occur again.

Proposed Action Alternative:

Abandoned unauthorized trails would naturally rehab and their visual impacts gradually reduce, while the visitor use on the designated trail system could result in more visibility of those trails.

CUMULATIVE IMPACTS

Cumulative impacts are those impacts resulting from the incremental impact of an action when added to other past, present, or reasonably foreseeable actions regardless of what agency or person undertakes such other actions.

Past Actions: The Acton Recreation Area is located in Yellowstone County. Hoskins Basin Archaeological District, covering 70% of the proposed project area, was listed on the National Register of Historic Places on November 20, 1974. Historical impacts affecting lands in Yellowstone County include livestock grazing, dryland and irrigation farming, timber, wildland fire, mineral extraction, a wide variety of recreational activities, and transportation. These actions have resulted in increased erosion, wildlife habitat fragmentation and loss, wildlife displacement, historical, cultural and paleontological site destruction, noxious weed infestations, and public safety conflicts and issues.

Present Actions: Currently all past actions are continuing to occur within Yellowstone County. In the last 10 years approximately 112,125 acres of the county have been burned in wildland fire, this represents approximately 7% of the county. Currently there is approximately 8,703 acres leased for oil and gas exploration and development, of that only 200 acres are held by production. This represents 5% and 0.01% of the county respectively. Currently there are several important transportation routes through the county,

Table 6 below lists them.

Table 6: Transportation Routes in Yellowstone County

Transportation Route	Distance (miles)
Interstate-90	44
Interstate-94	52
US-Highway 87	44
State Highway 3	34
US-Route 212	4

Currently there are a total of 90 Rights-of-Way on approximately 847 acres in Yellowstone County. This represents 0.05% of the county.

The BLM manages approximately 77,375 acres in Yellowstone County or approximately 5% of the county.

Past and present activities in the county have resulted in an estimated county population of approximately 114,797.

On smaller scale activities occurring on lands in and in the vicinity of the Acton Recreation Area is limited primarily to agriculture, and livestock grazing as well as recreation. Livestock grazing and agriculture have been continuous since settlement, presumably in the early 1900s. Recreation has become the other predominant activity of the lands since the later part of the last century.

Reasonably Foreseeable Actions: Grazing is intended to continue at current levels on BLM administered public lands, while recreational use is anticipated to increase somewhat. The Bureau of Land Management is not aware of any other pending applications or proposals for new or different land uses. Therefore, in the absence of wildland fire no major changes to the status quo are anticipated.

Cumulative Impacts: Impacts from all past, present and reasonable foreseeable actions have been considered. Impacts from past and present action have been primarily to wildlife populations and watershed health (erosion and water quality). These impacts are expected to continue at present levels and are not expected to increase as long as the project parameters are adhered to.

CHAPTER 4

PERSONS, GROUPS, AND AGENCIES CONSULTED

During the preparation of the EA, the public was notified of the Proposed Action through a posting on the Billings Field Office NEPA Register on March 8, 2013. The document was posted online on the Billings Field Office webpage for a 15 day public comment period beginning May 15, 2014. A total of eighteen (19) comments were received by the Billings Field Office by the end of the comment period, ranging from strong supports to concerns regarding wildlife habitat and authorizing illegal activities. The comments, while valued by BLM, did not substantially alter the analysis or the determination of impacts.

Table 7: List of Persons, Agencies and Organizations Consulted

Name/Agency	Purpose & Authorities for Consultation or Coordination	Findings & Conclusions
Montana Historical Society CRIS Database query	Recorded archaeological sites	Site presence information provided above
Montana Historical Society CRABS Database query	Site inventory documentation	Listed sources provided above
Montana State Historic Preservation Office	Concurrence with BLM determinations of eligibility and effect	SHPO concurrence received
Local Mountain Bike advocates	Provide scoping comments on location and types of trails	Incorporated where possible
Montana Department of Natural Resources	Adjacent land management authority for consistency	Incorporated concerns in project design

Table 8: List of Preparers

Name (and agency, if other than BLM)	Title	Responsible for the Following Section(s) of this Document
Tim Finger	Outdoor Recreation Planner	Recreation, Visual Resources
Carolyn Sherve-Bybee	Archaeologist/Planner	NEPA
Dustin Crowe	Range Management Specialist	Vegetation, Soil, Range, and Livestock
Larry Padden	Natural Resources Specialist	Noxious and Invasive Plants
Jay Parks	Wildlife Biologist	Wildlife
Jennifer Macy	Archeologist	Cultural and Paleontological Resources
Dave Lefevre	Outdoor Recreation Planner (MSO)	Recreation
Tom Carroll	Realty Specialist	Lands and Realty
Craig Drake	Assistant Field Office Manager	Resource Review

APPENDIX 1

Figure 3: Map of PFYC Distribution

